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Wei, Yindong, "The Sense of Ritual in the Tourism Experience: Diverse Cultures and Native Concepts in a two-nation Comparison" (2016). *Travel and Tourism Research Association: Advancing Tourism Research Globally*. 7.
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The Sense of Ritual in the Tourism Experience: Diverse Cultures and Native Concepts in a two-nation Comparison

Introduction

Through the process of modernization, people have become more alienated from others and their own cultural heritage in which has limited emotional connectedness and spontaneity (Wang, 1996). As a result, many people try to find spaces outside their functional domains that demarcate the profane from the sacred (Graburn, 1989), responsibilities from freedom, and work from leisure (Wang, 1999). In these marginal sacred spaces, people seek spiritual solace, increase faith and piety, and experience forms of renewal. Tourism itself can be that needed space for many people in modern society and may function as a form of “religion” or at least pilgrimage. In this vein, van Abbeele (1980) argued “tourism is the opium of modern people” in reference to Karl Marx’s (1956) “religion is the opium of the people”.

Hence, religion, faith and spirituality may cause people to want to travel (Stausberg, 2014). Graburn (1983, 1989) suggested that “tourism is a sacred journey”, a means of physically and mentally relaxing, which happens periodically to help people reconcile with life’s challenges, much the same way devotees do during a religious pilgrimage.

Comparing tourism with pilgrimage, Turner (1969) noted that the pilgrim contains structure and anti-structure, when people leave their ordinary world they enter a liminal world (1984), where people “expect things of themselves and others which they may not expect while they are at home” (Holmberg, 1993). As they mingle with others beyond the normative bonds of home, classlessness ensues and relationships develop based on their common humanity (Turner, 1973), forming what Turner refers to as *communitas*. Likening travel to a spiritual experience, Graburn (1983, 1989) argued that tourism is a special ritual. Such ritualization processes through travel have also been investigated in a variety of other tourism contexts: disaster sites (Blasi, 2002; Conran, 2002); literary tourism (sites connected to the lives and works of authors)(Herbert, 2001); nostalgic tourist attractions (e.g. Walt Disney World)(Knight, 1999). Despite the pervasiveness of these treatises on tourism as ritual, little new research has promoted an in-depth understanding of tourism-ritualization experiences, and there have been few, if any, comparisons between nationalities in this regard, including Chinese and American tourists’ cognitive differences. As such, this study examines the sense of ritual in tourism.

Literature Review

Tourism as a Form of Ritual

Early scholars limited their studies of ritual to the realm of religion. Later, with the subsequent deeper understanding of rituals and ritualization, the study of ritual was gradually extended to other elements of society. Emile Durkheim (1976) proposed a “profane-sacred” continuum, he argued that religion is a social activity that reflects social phenomena and needs to be understood from this perspective. Like his contemporaries, Van Gennep (1960) summarized a general pattern of rite from various rites, i.e. rite of passage. Later, Victor Turner continued to rework the theory, deepening the analysis of liminality, raise *communitas* as a state of peak experience, and forward the concept of structure and anti-structure to enhance our understanding of the sociality of ritual. From then on, research shows a strong penetration of ritual in people’s daily life,

especially in the area of tourism (Turner, 1969; MacCannell, 1976; Cohen, 1979; Graburn, 1983, 1989)

As the founder of tourism ritual theory, Graburn revealed the relationship between ritual and tourism. He suggested that “Tourism is one of those necessary structured breaks from ordinary life”. And as a form of ritual, tourism has the same structural process a general ritual. He also utilized Turner’s ideas of liminality, liminoid, *communitas* and flow to express the state of communion in tourism.

However, this macrotheory is also questioned in its basic assumption and empirical basis (Stausberg, 2014). Cohen maintained that tourists cannot be described generically and he proposed five primary modes of tourist experience to form a spectrum (Collins-Kreiner, 2010). Nash (1996), a positivist, questioned every process of treating tourism as a ritual, from tourists’ motivations, experience to tourism’s influence (Nash, 1996). Under these doubts and criticisms, more empirical studies and theoretical innovations are needed.

Tourist Experiences

Tourist experience research began in the mid-1960s in western academic writing. Boorstin (1964) first defined tourist experience as a popular consumer behavior, and lamented the ongoing loss of “real” travel. MacCannell (1976) discussed the modernity of touristic experience and constructed an authenticity research paradigm. Cohen (1979) classified tourists using a phenomenology perspective to understand their experiences. In the 1980s, scholars began to engage in tourist satisfaction research (Pearce, 1982; Hamilton-Smith, 1987; Noe, 1987). Chris Ryan’s edited book “Tourism Experience” in the 1990s collated representative articles about the tourist experience research up to that point in time. Recently, models for measuring and predicting tourist satisfaction are becoming more popular (Yoon & Uysal, 2005; Mang, Teapanon & Uysal, 2008).

Research on Chinese tourist experiences started relatively late. Xie Yanjun (1999) is the main pioneering scholar to study tourist experiences in China. He first systematically expounded on the meaning, content and implementation of tourist experiences. Zou Tongqian (2004) argued that the product design and service configuration of scenic spots is to create a unique experience for tourists. Xie Yanjun (2005) published a book “Tourism Experience Research—A Phenomenological Perspective” to push tourist experience research to new heights.

Although there has been some research progress, the sense of ritual in research on tourist experience has not been done in China, and in fact is rare everywhere. All of the concepts described above will establish a foundation for researching the sense of ritual in the future.

Methodology

First, the exploratory stage included a literature review to grasp the ritual and ritualization, characteristics and trends, and summarize relevant theoretical knowledge points to establish the conceptual basis of the research.

The fieldwork stage explores the experience of Chinese and US tourists undertaking the “ritual process” in ethnic ritual, religious ritual and folk ritual processes various destinations/attractions, such as Walt Disney, Festival Park, by adopting a phenomenological approach. Interviews with tourists relate to questions about experiences, such as previous knowledge of the sense of ritual, and particular impressive experiences, in great detail to gather information about the significance

and the construction of the sense of ritual in the tourists' view. Data are collected through individual interviews and focus groups. In addition, a structured questionnaire will be designed to know about basic information of Chinese and American tourists and their perceptions and views. Many of the survey questions will come from the initial interviews. The paper will adopt a mixed method approach, using both qualitative and quantitative data and analysis, including factor analysis, cluster analysis, MANOVA and one-way ANOVA to develop concepts related to the ritualization of travel.

Results

1. Research the significance of ritual in the tourism experience, study the research in the following areas to provide a theoretical framework for further empirical research:

(1) Analyze the connotation and composition (e.g. fear, sacred feeling and harmonious feeling, etc.) of the sense of ritual.

(2) Reveal the development history of the sense of ritual and its links with the tourist experience.

(3) Explain the sense of ritual's operational mechanism in the tourism experience.

(4) Explore the sense of ritual's reference to other anthropological (e.g. profane/sacred, a rite of passage, theory of liminality) and sociological (e.g. authenticity) concepts.

2. Research tourists' cognitive differences regarding the sense of ritual in different cultural contexts, and mainly take Chinese and American tourists as an example.

3. Research various "native concepts" established for the sense of ritual in American and Chinese cultural contexts and take these "native concepts" as a foundation for theoretical development, and develop some new paths to enrich Chinese tourism research in the sense of ritualization.

Conclusion and Discussion

Modern life, pervaded by materialism, has negatively affected people's spiritual well-being. This has caused many people to escape from ordinary life and seek meaning through tourism. But "commoditization", "staged authenticity" and "loss of presence" through tourism have also reduced the meaningful value of travel, so that the introduction of "the sense of ritual" becomes necessary. To understand the sense of ritual well, some problems should be explored in steps as shown in Fig. 1:

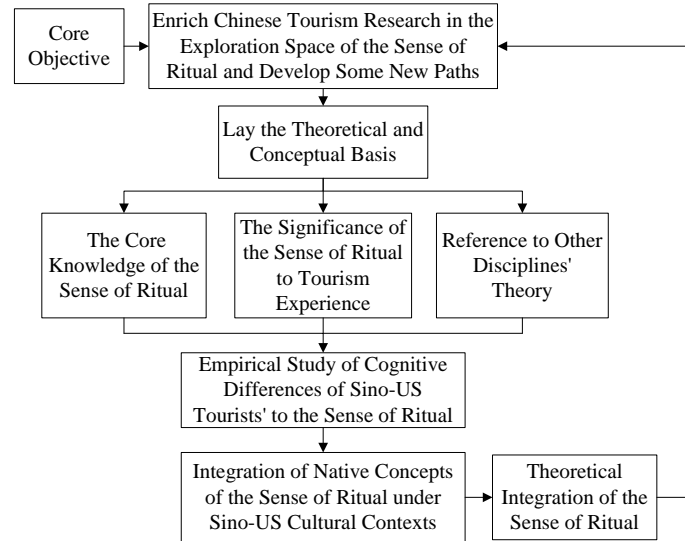


Fig. 1 Research Technical Route

As the sense of ritual's operational mechanism is discovered, it will provide a reference for scenic resorts to design tourism projects to be more interesting, more meaningful and even more enlightening.

By interpreting the tourism ritual theory and the concept of the sense of ritual in tourism experience, the findings will make tourists to learn to appreciate the value and significance of tourism behind its surface form, produce aesthetic experience, and even achieve first-degree enjoyment.

Through the comparative study of the cognitive differences of Chinese and US's tourists, the research findings will make respective tourists' cognition better understood and mutual targeted tourism market exploited more effectively.

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